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The Alluring and Manipulative “Spider Women” of the Silver Screen: *Femmes Fatales* of the
Hard-Boiled Fiction, Classic Noir and Contemporary Noir Periods

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
Communications

by

Gretchen Theresa Anne Brinker

B.A. University of New Orleans, 2004

December, 2008

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to MaMa, JaJa, Toby, and Princess; to all the victims (and their families) of Hurricane Katrina, Hurricane Rita, Hurricane Gustav, Hurricane Ike, and 9/11; to Jayne Mansfield; to Mariska Hargitay, Peter Hermann, their son (August), and their family; and to Marilyn Monroe.

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My Mom, Dad, brother Jon, and pet turtle - - Charlie - - have supported me throughout the process of writing my thesis. I appreciate that so much. They are truly my inspirations.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	v
Introduction	1
Chapter 1	3
Chapter 2	22
Chapter 3	28
Chapter 4	30
Conclusion	32
Bibliography	35
Filmography	37
Vita.....	38

Abstract

This thesis delves into three categories of *femmes fatales*: the ones of hard-boiled fiction/classic *noir* and contemporary *noir*. Moreover, it generates several comparisons among those aforementioned categories, and extrapolates on them. Third wave feminism and how it draws relevance/is significant to the *Bound* and *The Last Seduction* films is additionally explored in this thesis. This thesis will discuss the similarities of the *femmes fatales* of the '30s/1940s-50s and contemporary *noir* (1980s-90s), while delving into differences between them.

femmes fatales film noir

Introduction

The term *femme fatale* has its origins in the 1800s (Spicer 1991). Stories then, such as the British gothic novels - - for example, *The Monk* (Matthew Gregory Lewis), *Juliette* (Marquis De Sade), and *Carmilla* (a short story in Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *In a Glass Darkly*) - - focused on women who took advantage of other people. Other names for *femmes fatales* include spider women or vamps. *Femmes fatales* are especially deceitful, when it comes to manipulating men for their own purposes. The consequences of their duplicitous actions on others don't bother *femme fatales* at all.

Femmes fatales can be found in the hard-boiled fiction of the 1930s, in the classic noir films of the 1940s-50s, and in contemporary noir movies. The *femmes fatales* from those aforementioned decades can be compared. They do have their similarities, in addition to their differences. One decade, in particular, focused on more than *femme fatale*-type characters: For example, the *femmes fatales* from the hard-boiled novels of the 1930s could be described as using their charm and naïveté to lure their male protagonists into working with them to achieve their goals (which would be of benefit to the *femmes fatales*). However, the 1940s-50s featured more than *femmes fatales*: Working women, ingénues, *noir redeemers*, and "women as victims" are the myriad characters that are also a part of/integral to that decade (Biesen 161).

The similarities between the *femmes fatales* of the '30s/1940s-50s and contemporary noir of the 1980s-90s (such as acting brazenly; desiring power, money and wealth; using others for their own means; and lying), and differences (the contemporary noir *femmes fatales* are more independent in their jobs, and work better jobs; and they don't scheme with their male victims, but rather work against them, and tell them what to do) between them will be discussed in chapters one and two. In chapter three of this thesis, the *femme fatale* characters from the

hard-boiled fiction, classic *noir*, and contemporary *noir* eras will be compared. A connection to third-wave feminism and *femmes fatales* in contemporary *noir* films will be explored in chapter four of this thesis.

Femmes fatales pose a threat to the male characters, who are often unaware of their sinister schemes. *Femmes fatales* are confident, smart, and beautiful; these are the characteristics that lure men to become their intended victims. Sometimes, though, the *femmes fatales* do fall in love with the men that they wish to use; on the other hand, they more often just abhor the men that they are scheming with to achieve their own goals.

Femme fatale characters aren't afraid to take risks; they are quite brazen. They possess a wisdom about them, which is especially helpful when it comes to plotting their myriad schemes. Even though they don't consider the risks of their actions upon the men they are scheming with, they also rarely think about the repercussions of those actions on themselves. That, in some cases, can lead to the *femmes fatales'* deaths.

Chapter One: The *Femmes Fatales* of the '30s and Other Female Characters of Classic Film *Noir*

Hard-boiled pulp fiction narratives - - or hard-boiled “serie *noir*” - - have their origins in the “roman *noir*” or “black novel”, deemed as the British gothic novel by 18th and 19th century French critics (Biesen 161). These hard-boiled detective novels focus on “essentially good though flawed and vulnerable protagonists at odds with mysterious and sexual others” (161); that is to say male characters cajoled into participating in (usually illegal) activities by alluring *femmes fatales*. These *femmes fatales* want the consequences of these actions to be of benefit to themselves - - and care little about their impact on the male protagonists. Often, the *femmes fatales* in hard-boiled fiction novels kill their male counterparts (164).

One example of a hard-boiled pulp fiction novel is James M. Cain’s *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, written in 1934. It is based on the real-life case of Ruth Snyder, a *femme fatale* who seduced her lover in committing the brutal murder of her husband - - which was for insurance money (165). This made excellent tabloid fodder in the 1920s... especially *The New York Daily News*’s image of Snyder in the electric chair (165).

At first appearance, Cora seems to be demure when Frank sees her; however, that perception changes when she seduces him not too soon after meeting Frank. He soon discovers that Cora is lonely, and wasn’t pleased to be married to Nick... or even working with him at the Twin Oaks Tavern. Cora appreciates that Frank doesn’t view her as passive and weak like her husband, Nick, does. Their strong attraction to one other leads them to immediately start an affair; however, someone is a hindrance to their love: Nick. As a result, Cora and Frank formulate a plan to make it appear that Nick accidentally falls down and drowns in a bathtub (Cain 19). This plan, however, isn’t successful (Nick survives the fall in the bathtub) - - and both Cora and Frank are initially suspected by the police of having tried to kill Nick.

After failing to get rid of Nick out of their lives forever, Cora and Frank spend some time apart from each other. One day, Frank suddenly encounters Nick. Nick is happy to see him (he still is not cognizant of Frank and Cora's affair), and explains to Frank that he is recovering well after having fallen in the bathtub. In addition, Nick mentions that he wishes Frank would resume working with him and Cora at the Twin Oaks Tavern (34). After thinking over that matter, Frank decides to return to work at Nick's roadside diner.

Nick is excited about Frank's return to the Twin Oaks Tavern, but Cora isn't too happy about that. She prefers for Frank to have forgotten about her (39). Cora is thinking like that because she is in a bad mood... after discovering that Nick wants to become a father very soon. She has no desire to become pregnant with his child, though. Cora explains that to Frank - - and he advises her to not let Nick's sudden interest in starting a family upset her. He tells her that together they will devise another plan to remove Nick from their lives forever, which would ultimately cause a car accident where Nick wouldn't survive. The plan goes accordingly as they hoped it would: Nick ends up dying in that automobile crash.

The police officers are suspicious of Cora and Frank, and have a feeling that they planned the automobile accident on Malibu Lake Road that ended Nick's life. A jury also finds Cora and Frank to have been responsible for that. The cops and D.A. make a deal with the two of them, which involves Cora and Frank not having to serve jail time for Nick's murder (in addition, Cora and Frank receive Nick's insurance money in the amount of \$10,000 [86]).

With the freedom of not having Nick in their lives now, Cora and Frank get married, adopt a pet puma, and are expecting a baby. Sadly, their happiness is short lived: Cora and Frank get in a car accident, which ends Cora's life. The police don't suspect it is an accident, however, and charge Frank with murdering Cora. The jury find him guilty of that charge, and sentence him

to death (Cain 115). No matter how hard he tries to convince others, nobody believes that Frank is innocent of murdering Cora... except for the priest assigned to counsel him, Father McConnell.

It is unfortunate that Frank is charged with murdering Cora, because he didn't commit that crime. He really loved her, and wouldn't want to kill her (if he hadn't loved her, he wouldn't have returned to the Twin Oaks Tavern when Nick asked him). However, the fact that he was involved in the car accident that killed Nick - - and played a part in the bathtub accident where Nick almost drowned - - doesn't put Frank on good terms with the cops. Moreover, he and Cora immediately accepted the \$10,000 insurance policy after Nick died; the cops believe that Frank staged the car accident so he could have access to the full amount of the money. With those aforementioned things against him, Frank doesn't have a chance of being found innocent.

Cora proved herself to be a *femme fatale*: seducing Frank, scheming with him to kill Nick for his insurance policy, and accepting the insurance money soon after Nick's passing. Interestingly enough, however, Cora wasn't just using Frank to kill Nick; she did have feelings for him (they got married, adopted a pet puma, and were going to be parents). Cora appreciated that Frank listened to her talk about her unhappiness with being married to Nick... and her wish to make a fresh start without him. In addition, Cora didn't unfairly judge Frank - - like many had done - - and let him become a part of her life. Even though Cora was calculating, and involved Frank in her plan to kill Nick, she truly loved Frank; Frank also loved her. If Cora hadn't died in that car accident, she and Frank would have had a happy life together, with their child and pet puma.

The Postman was written in 1934 - - around the time of the Great Depression - - and is indicative of the mood of the United States then. People had to do their best to find work, earn

money, and save money in the years of the Great Depression. Moreover, one had to be cognizant of surroundings, and not taken advantage of by others. When a better chance or opportunity arrived for someone during the Great Depression, it would behoove him/her to take it. That is what happened when Cora met Frank; she saw him as a means to get away from her loveless marriage to Nick. Cora had feelings for Frank, and he loved her, too; they wanted to be together. For that to occur, Cora involved Frank in her plan to murder Nick. They thought of the bathtub accident scheme, which wasn't successful. However, Cora and Frank didn't let that failure stop them from thinking of another scheme to end Nick's life: the car accident on Malibu Lake Road.

There are female characters that differed from the *femme fatale* characters in hard-boiled fiction narratives in that they present the image of "a more multifaceted working career woman as America entered World War II." (Biesen 161). Moreover, the female characters of classic film *noir* include more than the ones found in hard-boiled pulp fiction:

Some female characters of classic film *noir* are like the hard-boiled *femmes fatales* in pulp fiction - - thinking only about themselves and posing a lethal threat to their male counterparts - - while others are viewed as *noir* redeemers, "women as victims" (161), and as "distraught ingénues" (164). In addition, women in classic *noir* films are portrayed as strong and fearless. This reiterates the "Rosie the Riveter" and women-at-work images that permeate the World War II atmosphere (164). Female characters of classic *noir* also can be drawn from a plethora of working girls, such as taxi drivers, book clerks, detectives, and cabaret singers (166).

Examples of classic *noir* films that feature hard-boiled *femmes fatale* characters are *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (Tay Garnett, 1945-46), *Scarlet Street* (Fritz Lang, 1945), *The Big Sleep* (Howard Hawks, 1945-46), *Detour* (Edgar Ulmer, 1945), *Gilda* (Charles Vidor, 1946), *Stella Dallas* (King Vidor, 1937), and *Double Indemnity* (Billy Wilder, 1944) (165). Garnett's

The Postman Always Rings Twice was based on the hard-boiled pulp fiction work of James M. Cain; Wilder's *Double Indemnity*'s *femme fatale* character - - Phyllis Dietrichson - - was inspired by Ruth Snyder. Snyder, a real-life *femme fatale*, was also the basis for Cain's *The Postman*.

Those hard-boiled *femme fatale* characters are “spider women,” and they lure the male protagonists into committing murder or other egregious acts for them. These male protagonists aren't initially aware of the consequences of these actions, because they are in love with the “spider women” *femmes fatales*. Often, they themselves end up murdered by the “spider women,” who use them to accomplish their means.

In Edgar Ulmer's *Detour*, the male protagonist, Al Roberts, meets Vera, who is a very conniving hitchhiker. She causes him to make bad decisions, and interferes with his mission to reunite with his former love, Sue, in Hollywood. Unlike Sue, Vera is only concerned about herself, and doesn't care a bit for Al (she even feigns being his “girlfriend”). Vera wants to exploit Al's naïve, sensitive demeanor - - and manipulate him.

When Al first meets Vera, she is hitchhiking on the side of the road (with nowhere to go). He feels sorry for her, and decides to pick her up. Her appearance is disheveled, and it appears as if she is lost. Not soon after, however, Al discovers that is a façade of Vera's ... and that she is really a self-centered person. She starts to control Al, and even poses a threat to his life. Vera is quite menacing towards Al: She constantly berates him, and whenever he errs in judgment, she doesn't hesitate to notify him about that (Vera even knows about the accidental death of Al's friend; even though he was not responsible for that incident, Vera convinces him otherwise). Strangely enough, Al can't stop thinking about her, and develops an attraction for her. They become lovers, and Vera reiterates that they are meant for each other. Their love is destructive,

and they argue quite a bit. However, Al feels that he and Vera are supposed to be together - - as if they are soul mates.

Vera takes advantage of Al in that she wants him to commit crimes for her - - she could care less about the consequences he could face for them. If he were sent to jail for committing crimes on her behalf, Vera wouldn't get upset over that; instead, she would probably find another person like Al to control for her own means. Vera is a bona fide "spider woman" *femme fatale* character of the classic film *noir* period.

Gilda features another "spider woman" *femme fatale* character - - Gilda, played by Rita Hayworth - - who can be described as sensual and vulnerable (169). Even though she exudes an air of confidence, she also occasionally feels doubt about herself. Moreover, some people don't treat her with respect; they are condescending towards her.

Gilda wants to be independent, and doesn't let anyone interfere with that goal. She uses her alluring sexuality to make men do things for her, and persuades them to listen to her requests. Gilda works in a cabaret as a singer, dancer, and strip tease artist; she is the object of many of the male patrons' gazes. They view her as a powerful, self-assured woman who doesn't have any fears. The male patrons are fascinated by Gilda's brazen attitude at the cabaret.

Although Gilda feels powerful and confident while performing at the cabaret - - as if she were on top of the world - - her self-esteem begins to wane when dealing with the men in her personal life. Her husband, a crime kingpin, intimidates her with regards to his illegal activities; in addition, she doesn't like it when he constantly interrogates his business partner - - who was also Gilda's ex-boyfriend - - about his management of the shady business matters (Biesen 170). This causes her to experience distress, and to become more vulnerable (170). It is as if she were a

“real” person, who had doubts about herself - - not just a *femme fatale* cabaret performer who doesn’t have a conscience or feelings.

That is what makes Gilda’s “spider woman” *femme fatale* character believable and likeable. Gilda is more than the *femme fatale* image she exudes: She is also a “working girl”, trying to earn money on her own; she wants to be independent, and does not want to rely on her husband to provide for her all of the time; she is a *noir* redeemer (reconciling with her past actions); she is confident about her goals and dreams; and she is a victim, in terms of her relationship with her demanding, taunting crime-kingpin husband (170). The female audience members empathize with *Gilda*’s protagonist, because she tries her best to resolve the conflicting identities of “working girl”, victim, *noir* redeemer, being a confident person, and being an independent woman.

Another example of a “spider woman” *femme fatale* is *Double Indemnity*’s (Billy Wilder, 1944) Phyllis Dietrichson (Barbara Stanwyck), a former nurse. When she meets Walter Neff (Fred MacMurray), an insurance salesman, Phyllis views him as someone to help kill her husband (so she can receive his insurance money). She never has feelings of love towards him - - but rather uses him in her plot to murder her husband. Walter agrees to aid her with that, after she flirts with him the first time they meet (she shows him her anklet bracelet, and they exchange innuendos with each other). However, Phyllis is not concerned about the consequences that Walter might face - - such as losing his job as an insurance salesman, and going to jail - - if convicted in the murder of her husband; rather, she is just concerned about her own well-being and greediness.

After Walter and Phyllis do succeed in murdering her husband, Walter starts to feel a little guilty about participating in that heinous crime - - especially when his boss, Barton Keyes,

starts talking about “fake insurance claims”, and the depths people will go just to receive insurance money. Keyes even deems his conscience “The Little Man,” and tells Walter that it never lets him go astray. Walter views Keyes as a father figure of sorts, and is afraid that Keyes will deem Phyllis’s claim for her husband’s insurance money (and the way he was “accidentally killed” on the train) as suspicious.

Walter reiterates to Phyllis that he fears their plot to murder her husband will be discovered, even though nobody noticed that they killed her husband. Phyllis just ignores this anxious thought of his, and believes that they “got away with murder.” Walter also informs her that Keyes is leery of her double-indemnity insurance claim, and suggests to Phyllis that they don’t speak with each other until Keyes’s suspicions dissipated. Phyllis doesn’t take heed of what Walter told her, and just goes her own way.

When Walter speaks with Phyllis’s stepdaughter, Lola, she reveals to him her wariness of her stepmother and her motives. Little does he know that Phyllis - - who used to be a former nurse - - murdered her husband’s first wife. Perhaps if he were informed of this, Walter wouldn’t have participated in Phyllis’s treacherous plot to kill her husband for his insurance policy money.

Moreover, Lola discloses to Walter that her stepmother is having an affair with her boyfriend, Nino Zaccetti. This not only angers Lola but also Walter. Phyllis repeatedly told Walter how much she loved him, and he thought that she had developed feelings of love for him. Finding out that Phyllis just used him as a pawn in the murder of her husband makes Walter very upset.

As a result of that shocking betrayal, Walter confronts Phyllis (this would turn out to be their last meeting). He asks her if that were indeed true, and Phyllis confirms that. Not soon after,

they begin violently arguing; their fighting becomes so intense that Phyllis pulls out a gun, and shoots it in the air. However, the bullet seemingly doesn't hit anyone.

Suddenly, Walter goads Phyllis to shoot him, but she refuses to do that; instead, she becomes confused. At this point, Walter removes the gun from her hand, & points it at her. He then asks her if she does indeed love him; Phyllis responds "no" at first. She explains how she "used" him in her plot to kill her husband for the insurance money. Then, she changes her mind, saying that she is starting to love him (20). Walter doesn't believe her, and decides to shoot Phyllis. She dies as a result from that wound. Walter then realizes that Phyllis's gunshot did hit him, after he sees he is bleeding. Later, he dies from that wound. Phyllis's "spider woman" *Femme fatale* personality proved fatal both to her herself and to Walter. Her greediness and his attraction to her led to nothing but tragedy.

Another "spider woman" *femme fatale* is *Sunset Boulevard's* (Wilder, 1950) Norma Desmond. She is an aging former Hollywood star, and can't accept the fact that the public has forgotten about her. She lives with her butler//ex-husband, Max von Meyerling, who she controls all of the time. She wants everyone to be at her "beck and call", and view her as a type of goddess. Max has to constantly praise her, and tell her what a talented, viable actress she still is - even though he knew it had been years since she worked on a film. Max's false encouragement everyday boosts Norma's self-esteem.

One day, out of the blue, a struggling screenwriter named Joe Gillis ends up at Norma and Max's palatial, sprawling estate because his car broke down. However, both Norma and Max believe that he is the coffin deliverer; they had ordered a coffin earlier to bury Norma's dead pet chimpanzee (who was like a child to her). When he tells them that he isn't the coffin deliverer - - but rather an aspiring screenwriter whose car broke down near their mansion - - Norma doesn't

excuse Joe to continue on his way; instead, she starts to interrogate him about his life as a screenwriter. Norma is just concerned about herself and her chance to return to acting, and imposes on Joe's time.

Being the polite person he is, Joe decides to entertain Norma's myriad questions about his screenwriting projects, experience, among other things. When Norma offers Joe one of her scripts (which she composed herself) to read - - entitled *Salomé* - - he initially refuses to peruse it, because he has other tasks in which to attend. However, Norma coerces him into proofreading that script. Not wanting to argue with Norma, Joe begins to read her script. It is hard for him to concentrate on it, though, since Norma is staring at him while he is doing that (she was looking for any reactions from him to the *Salomé* script).

After he reads the *Salomé* script, Joe politely tells Norma that it is good... but that some parts of it can be further developed. He then tells both her and Max "Goodbye", and begins to dismiss himself from their mansion. However, Norma doesn't let him leave the estate; rather, she orders Max to set up an overnight room for Joe. He will stay with them and continue to help Norma with her *Salomé* script. Joe tells Norma that he can't stay any longer, because he has other responsibilities. Again, Norma won't accept that answer, and coerces him into spending the night at the mansion. Nobody can refuse her imposing demands, even if s/he has more pressing matters in which to attend.

Joe doesn't feel comfortable working with Norma on her *Salomé* script, because her mansion feels like a "trap" to him (Telotte, 151). By inadvertently entering Norma's estate when his car broke down, he went into a realm of old photographs, movies, and memories of Norma as a young Hollywood starlet. Her mansion pays homage to this noteworthy past of hers - - it is indicative of Norma's film successes, which she achieved in her 20s. By keeping those old

pictures and films on display in her home, Norma feels like she is still that same young Hollywood actress... who was omnipotent and capable of anything. She thinks of herself as invincible to the world. Nothing can stop Norma from achieving her dream: She considers herself young at heart, and believes she has a genuine chance to return to the silver screen.

Laura Mulvey's work entitled "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" describes in-depth the concept of the alluring "look" of female actresses, especially *femmes fatales*, on the silver screen. That captures the attention of the male spectators in the audience, who wish that they were the male lead in those films - - which sort of gives a voyeuristic and vicarious approach to movie viewing. Norma knows that her visage and "gaze" on the silver screen when she was a young Hollywood starlet certainly made the male spectators in the audience notice her. As a result, she constantly shows studio publicity shots of her from that time to Max and Joe. She wants to reiterate to them that she wishes to return to the silver screen to relive those glorious days from her youth; Norma wants the male spectators in the audience to notice her "look" at the age of 50, as they did when she was in her 20s. She wishes her fans would "fall in love," and be enthralled by her "look."

In addition to working with Norma on her *Salomé* script, Joe has to pass countless hours with Norma screening the old films in which she starred. She sets up the projector to show them to both Joe and Max, while telling them narratives about the other actors in those films, how long it took to make them, among other things. Even though Joe reiterates to Norma that this time might be better utilized on her *Salomé* script, she doesn't heed his advice; instead, by showing the films, she wants Joe and Max to realize that she still possessed her true acting ability of her youth. She wishes that they would understand that she could make a valid comeback to Hollywood, and headline a major motion picture. She does not want them to think of her as a

“Hollywood has-been” (which, sadly, some directors and producers have deemed her). This illusion of a remarkable, fanfare-filled return to the Hollywood business is out of Norma’s grasp.

One day, when Joe mentions to Norma that some Hollywood screenwriter friends of his - - Artie Green and his fiancée, Betty Schaefer - - invited him to their New Year’s Eve soirée, she frowns upon hearing that. She doesn’t want him to leave the mansion to attend that party. That is interesting, because one would think that Norma would want Joe to attend events of that nature - - to mention her name to others in the Hollywood business, and how she wants to return to the silver screen. However, Norma wants the attention of both Joe and Max all of the time, because being the center of their worlds makes her feel like a valued person (like the one she was in her 20s). That causes her to think less of the Hollywood producers and directors who have forgotten about her.

No matter how she persists, she can’t make Joe change his mind about attending his friends’ New Year’s Eve party. While at that event, Joe enjoys socializing with Artie Green and Betty Schaefer, and meeting new fellow screenwriters and Hollywood show business people. It is refreshing for Joe to leave Norma’s clustered, overwhelming estate for a casual environment of people his age. However, Joe doesn’t remain long at that party: He returns to Norma’s mansion after finding out from Max via telephone that she had attempted to commit suicide (he had decided to call and check on her, because he was beginning to feel small pangs of guilt about leaving her behind). Green, Schaefer, and the new acquaintances of Joe become confused upon seeing him leave early from the party; they don’t know about him helping Norma with her script, and the possessive hold she maintains over him.

When Joe arrives at Norma’s estate, Max allows him to check on her condition. While Joe was at the party, Max called a doctor after Norma had cut her wrist (when she attempted

suicide). The doctor bandaged the self-inflicted cuts to her wrist, and told Max to monitor her over the next few hours. Max informs Joe of the doctor's orders, and advises him to be careful about what he said to Norma. However, Norma isn't really in the "fragile" condition that her doctor thought she was, and faked that suicide attempt to get Joe's attention (Max was a bit suspicious of Norma's suicide attempt, though). It was successful, because Joe rushed from the New Year's Eve soiree to be at her side. Norma would go at any length - - even if it involved drastic measures, such as suicide attempts - - to make Joe pay attention to her. Norma isn't concerned about the consequences of those actions, though... because she is a capricious woman who would do anything for others to notice her.

Norma rests for a few days before returning to work on her *Salomé* script; not soon after, Norma and Joe mull it over and deem it ready to present to Cecil B. DeMille. It is her dream for him to help her launch her comeback to Hollywood, because he was responsible for featuring her in the movies that made her a young Hollywood starlet. In addition, Norma becomes excited upon learning from Max that the Paramount movie studio - - where DeMille worked on his film projects - - had called wanting to speak with her. Norma then believes that it involves her starring in a new Hollywood project directed by DeMille; unfortunately, for Norma, it merely concerns trying to get her permission to use one of her ancient cars for a film. Since Norma is unable to personally answer her call, she, Max, and Joe assume that the Paramount movie studio had called her about making her *Salomé* script into a film... they don't find out the real reason until some time after entering the Paramount movie studio.

When they first arrive to the Paramount movie studio headquarters, Norma becomes whimsically nostalgic, remembering the "good old days" of working on her films there in her youth. She is delighted how the guards, actresses, and actors there didn't forget who she was.

After some time, though, DeMille and his film crew become distracted with everyone fawning over Norma, and he then tells Max and Joe why he wants to speak with Norma; however, they never disclose to Norma that DeMille just wished to see her about using one of her old cars for a film (learning that may have caused Norma to attempt suicide, and to become deeply depressed). Norma, Max, and Joe leave not soon after that.

The attention that Norma garners upon arriving on the Paramount studio grounds causes her to feel more superior than ever. However, it had imposed on DeMille and his crew's working schedule; Norma must have realized that, because the actors, actresses, and guards on DeMille's production were giving her a lot of fanfare for quite some minutes. She was not merely concerned of how that would affect DeMille and his crew's filming time, though - - Norma only thinks of her own needs and interests before others.

Norma isn't too happy about Joe's interest in his fellow screenwriter Betty Schaefer - - who he had spoken with at the New Year's Eve party - - because she wants him to be in love with her. She treats Betty Schaefer condescendingly upon accidentally picking up the phone when Betty calls the mansion, wanting to speak to Joe. Norma lies to Betty, telling her he isn't there... even though he is in the room next door. Suddenly, Joe hears that, and abruptly pulls the phone out of Norma's hand; he confirms to Betty that he does in fact live at Norma's mansion - - and that Betty is welcome to visit him there anytime. It is beginning to anger Joe that Norma wants to control every aspect of his life.

Femmes fatales, such as Norma, also hold deadly repercussions for their victims, and this is certainly evident in Joe's case: When he tells her that he is leaving her ominous mansion for good, Norma takes a handgun and shoots him. Because that crime was committed inside of her mansion, the police have to go there to file a report. They have to wait a long time to speak with

Norma, because she is only concerned about preparing herself for her “close-up”. She has no idea - - perhaps due to shock she experienced after shooting Joe - - that the police are there to film a movie with her as its leading star.

When she finally comes down to speak to the police about Joe’s murder, she is greeted by a crowd of reporters and spectators - - a paparazzi of sorts. Seeing all of them there makes Norma feel happy, knowing that they wished to view her again on the silver screen. Norma believes that the shooting for her *Salomé* script would begin on that day, with the plethora of people at the mansion there to support this recent acting endeavor of hers; Max even shines a spotlight on Norma for some time. It is unfortunate that Norma doesn’t realize the truth: that the police are there to interview her about Joe’s murder, and there will be no filming of her *Salomé* script.

Interestingly enough, the development of the classic film *noir femmes fatales* and other female characters occurred when women were starting to work more in Hollywood-based executive and creative positions (Biesen 161). Moreover, the majority of these jobs just happened to be in film *noirs* (161). Actresses were starting to participate more in the creation of these productions.

One such actress was Joan Fontaine, who acted in two *noirs*: *Rebecca* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1940) and *Suspicion* (Hitchcock, 1941) (161). Those two films are representative of issues dealing with World War II: They delve into themes relating to insanity, misogynyism, and gender distress (161). While the men were away at war, the women took over their jobs here in the United States; for example, a lot of these jobs were in factories and stores, among other common locations. Moreover, the women had to assume being the “head of household” while their husbands were fighting abroad. Even though the women did the best they could to raise

their families and work, their husbands were wary of them doing that; they were afraid that their wives would leave them when they returned from the war, wanting to be independent. The classic *noir* films manifest those fears, and the classic *noir femme fatale*, heroine, working-girl, and noir redeemer characters embodied them.

Some female stars of the classic *noir* movies - - such as the *femmes fatales* - - can be deemed as “manufactured” by the male executives in Hollywood, in that they controlled the stars’ contracts, determined which productions they would act in, and exercised other means of control over film content. Joan Fontaine, Vivian Leigh, and Ingrid Bergman are examples of such “manufactured” stars, whose careers were driven and controlled by David O. Selznick (Biesen 161).

Selznick would “loan” these actresses to various Hollywood-based studios, and manage how much money they would receive; for example, the RKO movie studio paid Selznick \$116,750 for Joan Fontaine to star in *Suspicion* (161). One would think that Fontaine would receive a significant portion of that amount. However, Selznick only paid her \$17,833 (161). He kept the rest of the money, and made a profit. His reasoning for paying Fontaine so little is that he wanted “... to keep her in line.” (161). If he paid Fontaine more than that, perhaps he believed that Fontaine would start making outrageous demands and turn into a “diva.” Or he thought that Fontaine wouldn’t be as obligated to her contract to work for him. By controlling Fontaine’s salary, Selznick demonstrated that he had power over her and the other “manufactured” female stars that worked for him. This sentiment echoed and perpetuated the fear of women being independent and in positions of high power around the World War II years.

Even though Joan Fontaine didn’t receive much of the money she earned while filming Hitchcock’s *Rebecca* and *Suspicion*, she enjoyed making those films. She wrote to Hitchcock

about starring in *Suspicion* when she found out about that role (161). This part really interested her; in her letter to Hitchcock, she mentioned, “*I must do that picture... I am even willing to play the part for no salary, if necessary.*” (161). When David O. Selznick discovered what Fontaine had done, he wasn’t too pleased. He wouldn’t condone Joan filming a movie for free. In addition, it angered him that Fontaine wrote this letter to Hitchcock without Selznick being cognizant of that. Selznick thought that Fontaine betrayed him in a sense. He didn’t want her to be a free-lance artist, and wanted to be credited for “manufacturing” her as a star (Biesen 163).

David O. Selznick wasn’t the only Hollywood executive to have “manufactured” female stars of the classic *noir* period: Howard Hawks (producer and director of *The Big Sleep*), Fritz Lang, and Walter Wanger also controlled the contracts of some female stars - - such as Joan Bennett, Ella Raines, and Lauren Bacall (165). Having control of what films these actresses starred in gave those Hollywood executives a feeling of power. It is as if these actresses were “commodities” for the studios and production companies; they earned a lot of money based on the actresses’ salaries (165). Moreover, the various female characters of the classic *noir* period could be deemed as a creation by male Hollywood executives (165). The male moviegoers enjoyed watching her on film - - drawn in by her look, or gaze - - while the female audience members admired her for her independence, strength, and confidence.

The working-girl characters of classic *noir* come from myriad backgrounds: *Stranger on the Third Floor’s* (Boris Ingster, 1940) character is a female detective who focuses on solving murder cases. In *The Phantom Lady* (directed by Robert Siodmak in 1944), the classic *noir* heroine is a female detective (166). This role of female detective was depicted on the movie screen at the same time as women were working to support their families while their husbands were fighting in World War II. The women audience members must have derived a source of

strength and inspiration while watching the female detectives in the classic *noir* films trying hard to solve crimes; they identified with their hard work and dedication to their jobs. The female detective characters were women who were trying to make things better in the world.

The Big Sleep also features working-girl characters, such as taxi drivers, book clerks, and cabaret singers, in addition to the “spider woman” *femme fatale* character (Biesen 166). A reason that the images of female characters in *The Big Sleep* are multifaceted - - and not just the ones of “spider women” - - could be that a woman helped to write the script: Leigh Brackett coscripted it (166). Brackett wanted to feature female characters that encompassed qualities appealing to female audience members, and that were not just “spider women” temptresses and manipulators.

In addition to the notorious “spider women” *femmes fatales* of the classic *noir* era, there are *noir* redeemers, “working” women, and heroines. There were a plethora of female characters for audiences to watch and relate to during World War II, whether these spectators were working mothers taking care of their households while their husbands were at war, women working in factories and stores to support their families while their husbands were fighting in World War II, men who enjoyed watching the devious deeds of *femmes fatales* on the silver screen, or young women who liked the melodrama of *noir* redeemers and heroines. During that aforementioned war, going to the movies served as an “escape” for these people; watching the classic *noir* female characters on the silver screen gave them a distraction, albeit temporary one, from the problems in the real world. Moreover, the female characters - - heroines, working girls, *noir* redeemers, and especially the *femmes fatales* - - were indicative of some men’s fears of their wives wanting to become more independent from them upon returning from fighting in World War II. Even though the women did the best they could to raise their families and work, their husbands were wary of them doing that; they were afraid that their wives would leave them when they returned

from the war, wanting to be independent. Two films representative of that gender distress - - in addition to insanity and misogynyism - - are *Rebecca* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1940) and *Suspicion* (Hitchcock, 1941) (Biesen 161).

In this chapter, *femmes fatales* of the '30s/1940s-50s were discussed. In addition, other female characters of the 1940s-50s are mentioned, such as noir redeemers, detectives, heroines, working girls, and victims. How movies of the 1940s were a distraction to the men fighting during World War II, and to their wives (who were managing their household, and/or working in stores and factories) were discussed in this chapter. The next chapter will delve into the *femmes fatales* of the 1980s-90s.

Chapter Two: Contemporary *Femmes Fatales* in Film *Noir* of the 1980s-90s

In addition to the *femmes fatales* of the '30s hard-boiled fiction/'40s-50s classic *noir*, there are the *femmes fatales* of the 1980s and '90s. They can be found in *The Last Seduction* (Dahl, 1994), *Bound* (Andy and Larry Wachowski, 1996), *No Way Out* (Donaldson, 1987), *Fatal Attraction* (Lyne, 1987), *Basic Instinct* (Verhoeven, 1992), and *Blue Velvet* (Lynch, 1986). Some of those films are based on the *noirs* of the '40s, and '50s: Donaldson's *No Way Out* was a 1987 remake of *The Big Clock* (Farrow, 1948) (Verevis 316). *The Last Seduction* has a storyline similar to Tay Garnett's 1945-46 *The Postman Always Rings Twice* and Billy Wilder's 1944 *Double Indemnity*.

Generation Xers and Yers enjoy watching contemporary film *noirs* and the ones of the past because they identify with their myriad themes: disillusionment, alienation, abandonment, and hopelessness (Schwartz 300). Moreover, the *femme fatale* protagonist characters may hold the attention of the male spectators in the movie theatres: In Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", she discusses how male movie goers view the *femme fatale* characters as sex objects, and consider them to be quite alluring. In addition, female spectators in the films' audiences may relate to the *femme fatale* characters, and become interested in their plethora of issues and problems on the silver screen: wanting to achieve power (most of the time at whatever costs to others), achieving a stable sexual identity, demanding attention, among other things (Mulvey's "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure'" pp. 29-30).

The Last Seduction features an ultimate *femme fatale* character named Bridget Gregory; she can be described as ruthless and exceptionally cold hearted. Bridget has a blunt personality, is not concerned about the feelings of others at all, and uses men who seem naïve to help her with her myriad deceitful schemes (Newman). Two of those men in particular - - her husband,

Clay Gregory, and boyfriend, Mike Swale - - don't realize Bridget's true greedy nature until it is too late. They become her "victims", and are too dumb to anticipate the probable repercussions of Bridget's many machinations.

Bridget definitely lacks a moral conscience, thinking about her own well-being. She enjoys manipulating people for her own needs: not considering the well-being or thoughts of others, and using them as "puppets." Bridget is not oblivious to the fact that stealing and fleeing with the money that she and Clay earn from selling illegal pharmaceutical cocaine is wrong - - Bridget merely is not concerned with the possible consequences of that action. In addition, Bridget is aware that in the beginning she isn't treating her boyfriend, Mike - - the resident she meets in Benton, while running from the law - - with the respect he deserves for trying to befriend her. She just views him as a way to get what she needs: room and board, sex, and information about the policies at the insurance company where they both work. What Bridget is really planning is to use Mike in her shameless scheme to kill her husband, Clay; as a result, she wouldn't have to worry about divorcing him. Moreover, all of Clay's personal wealth and assets would go to her. Having that would definitely empower Bridget, and enable her to start a new life sans Clay.

The Last Seduction's beginning shows a scene of Bridget coercing the colleagues who work under her supervision to make hasty sales at their place of employment. She constantly harasses them until they make sales with decent profits (of which she keeps a part of for herself). By bullying her colleagues, Bridget feels a sense of omnipotence, as if she ruled the world. On the contrary, her male colleagues feel extremely overwhelmed, insufficient, and embarrassed. In *The Last Seduction*, they wince and become very anxious when Bridget walks past them. They know what to expect then: a condescending attitude of Bridget. She, however, isn't concerned at

all about how that denigration of her coworkers made them feel: All she cares about is earning money - - at whatever cost it comes - - and being in charge of others. Her needs and desires come before others', and she feels a sense of pride about treating others with little respect. She snickers when she sees her male colleagues become nervous when she assigns work to them. In addition, she never praises them when they do good work; however, she doesn't hesitate to take credit for it.

Her male colleagues at work aren't the only ones who Bridget liked to berate: She intimidates her husband, Clay, to help her sell illegal pharmaceutical cocaine. Bridget believes that they can make a very decent profit doing that. However, she is cognizant of the dangers associated with selling illegal pharmaceutical cocaine; when Clay has to meet two buyers interested in purchasing some of Bridget and Clay's supply of it, he is almost murdered. Discovering that doesn't upset Bridget one bit, because her life's ambition is to make a lot of money - - even if involved breaking the law.

Fortunately, for both Clay and Bridget (albeit under different circumstances), Clay manages to avoid being killed by the two dangerous drug buyers, and flees with the \$700,000 profit. When he returns home to Bridget, she smiles upon ascertaining the money they have made from that deal. Soon after, Bridget begins to concoct a scheme, wondering how she would escape from Clay with that money. After some time, she thinks of the perfect way to leave both him and her New York City life behind, and takes off with the \$700,000. Fortunately, for Bridget, Clay never manages to catch up with her (although he does report what she had done with the money to the police). The plan she concocts proves her to be quite conniving, demonstrated by her manipulation of her escape and quick thinking.

Bridget is ready to create a new life for herself with the \$700,000 she manages to purloin from Clay; while traveling after having successfully escaped from Clay, Bridget encounters the small town of Beston. Bridget is accustomed to the fast-paced New York life style - - this would be a change for her. When she enters a Beston bar, she encounters Mike Swale, the only local who treats her respectfully. Bridget doesn't reciprocate that respect to him (she heckles him). She senses his naïveté, and deems him perfect to take advantage of; as a result, she decides to use his house as if it were her own (after Mike invites her to spend time there while Bridget is looking for a place to live). Moreover, she acts condescendingly towards Mike... and treats him like a boy toy. She partakes enjoyment in using others, especially men like Mike, for her own personal benefits.

As typical with *femmes fatales* and their male victims, Mike falls in love with Bridget, and thinks she is a very classy, beautiful, and intelligent woman. It pleases him that Bridget has taken an interest to him (he is unaware that is part of her scheme to make him kill Clay). Bridget doesn't love Mike whatsoever; she never reveals that to him, since she is using him. Even though she lets Mike call her "his girlfriend", she really isn't his girlfriend at all - - just a *femme fatale* schemer who manipulates Mike's sincere feelings for her to help Bridget achieve her ultimate goal, which is for Mike to kill Clay. She takes advantage of Mike's feelings for her to help her accomplish a cruel intention (one that involved murder).

After much planning, Bridget decides that it is time for Mike to kill Clay. To bring that to fruition, however, Bridget lies to Mike about Clay's personal life - - saying he is a wealthy, married man who is having an affair. She further explains to Mike that they could gain a lot of money by killing him; Bridget studies information about credit ratings and actuarial tables of philandering, rich men. Mike is very hesitant upon hearing Bridget's sinister idea. She has to

persuade him about the man's (Clay's) true nature, and that he deserves to be killed. Mike succumbs to Bridget's plan, and the two of them journey to New York City to the man's (Clay's) apartment. When they get there, Bridget tells Mike that her plan to kill the man (Clay) was set in motion - - and that she would guide him on what he had to do via signals. Much to Bridget's chagrin, things don't go as smoothly as she planned (albeit she took a lot of time preparing the scheme to kill Clay). Mike begins to feel pangs of guilt, and just can't go through the process of killing Clay. After some hesitation, Mike spots something interesting in the apartment: a wedding photo of Bridget and the man (Clay). Clay soon ascertains Mike that Bridget is not Wendy Kroy (Bridget had introduced herself to Mike using that alias). Her real name is Bridget Gregory, and she is indeed the wife of Clay. Hearing that breaks Mike's heart, and upsets him deeply; he thought that he really knew everything about Bridget's (Wendy's) background.

Bridget becomes impatient waiting for a signal from Mike that he had murdered Clay. She decides to go up to the apartment. There, she discovers something that she never expected: Mike and Clay are talking to each other. Moreover, both are extremely angry upon seeing her arrive at the apartment. However, Bridget doesn't become intimidated and forget about her scheme to kill Clay: She sprays mace down his throat, which ultimately results in his unfortunate death. To get revenge on Mike, she goads him into raping her (by revealing to him her cognizance of his past marriage to a transvestite in New York City). As a result, Mike gets arrested. In the end, Bridget accomplishes what she wanted to do, and is able to successfully escape with all of Clay's money. She is never punished for all of the lies that she told to Mike and Clay.

All of the chaos Bridget causes to get what she wants doesn't mean anything to her. Being the coldhearted *femme fatale* that she is, she isn't upset about Clay's death or that Mike is

sentenced to jail. She is just elated to leave New York City with the money - - and looks forward to starting a new life somewhere else. Since she doesn't have any pangs of guilt for all of the destruction she causes, that certainly deems Bridget as a notorious *femme fatale*. Regardless of where Bridget goes to begin her new "life", she will never stop being a manipulator: It is a part of whom she is, and a side of Bridget that will never be reformed.

Laura Mulvey's "look" concept - - why male spectators in a film's audience became enchanted by its *femme fatale* character - - relates to *The Last Seduction* in that Mike and the other male patrons are attracted by Bridget's alluring "look", as she enters with grand aplomb the small-town Boston bar. However, Mike is really fascinated by Bridget's air of confidence (or "look"), and is the only male patron to approach her. He decides to sit down at the bar with her, and begins chatting with her. Bridget doesn't treat him kindly, and instead embarrasses him in front of the bar patrons. She criticizes him and mocks his every action. Mike is persistent, though, and doesn't stop trying to gain Bridget's attention. It is if he were mesmerized by her *femme fatale* persona. When Mike first sees Bridget, she is a type of enigma for Mike, because he isn't certain from where she came. He considers her to be a cosmopolitan, classy woman - - unlike the ones in Boston in his opinion - - and wants to be the object of her affections. *Femme fatale* Bridget hones into his admiration of her, and decides to use him to help her accomplish her evil schemes (such as killing Clay). In addition to Clay, Mike is also a victim of Bridget's myriad manipulations.

In this chapter, the *femmes fatales* of the 1980s-90s were discussed, and how Generation Xers and Yers identify with the themes of the films - - abandonment, disillusion, hopelessness - - that feature them. In the next chapter, the *femmes fatales* of the '30s/1940s-50s and of the contemporary *noir* years of the 1980s-90s will be compared.

Chapter Three: Comparison of the *Femme Fatale* Characters from the Hard-Boiled Fiction, Classic *Noir*, and Contemporary *Noir* Eras

Although from different eras, the hard-boiled, classic *noir*, and contemporary *noir* *femmes fatales* share the same characteristics: manipulating others - - especially naïve men - - to get whatever they wanted; not considering the consequences of their devious actions; wanting to be independent; acting brazenly; desiring power and money; putting themselves and their needs before others; flirting constantly to help themselves achieve their sinister goals; preferring to live in the city; wearing expensive jewelry; possessing both beauty and ambition; working closely with their naïve partners - - intended victims - - to ensure that the schemes would be a success; and acting “innocent” upon meeting their intended victims, as if they didn’t have a clue what was happening around them. For example, *Sunset Boulevard*’s Norma Desmond and *The Last Seduction*’s Bridget Gregory, although *femmes fatales* from different time periods, share a lot of similarities: They enjoy wearing lavish jewelry, living in the city, and thinking about themselves over others (Spicer 90). The years may have passed but the duplicitous, greedy nature of the *femme fatale* character has never changed.

While some *femmes fatales* from the hard-boiled fiction, classic *noir*, and contemporary *noir* periods are able to enjoy the fruits of their labor via their manipulative ways, others are not; for example, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*’s Cora, *Double Indemnity*’s Phyllis, and *Fatal Attraction*’s Alex die as the result of accidents related to their deceitful behavior. On the other hand, *Detour*’s Vera, Gilda from *Gilda*, *Sunset Boulevard*’s Norma, *The Last Seduction*’s Bridget, *Basic Instinct*’s Catherine, and *Bound*’s Violet and Corky do not become victims of their conniving schemes. Perhaps they are better prepared for the consequences of them, or possess the wisdom to come out the victors. In addition, there were restrictions placed on the

films of the 1940s-50s, as the result of the production code in place then; this meant that directors and screenwriters could not let the deviant men and women in films get away with committing crimes. However, those restrictions weren't in place in the 1980s-90s, because the production code had ended before those decades.

In the classic *noir* period of the '40s-50s, there are also “working girl”, *noir* redeemer, and heroine characters, in addition to the “spider woman” *femme fatale*. The heroine, *noir* redeemer, and “working girl” characters are very prevalent during that time in the '30s. Perhaps that is because those characters were geared towards the women of World War II, who had to both manage their households and work while their husbands were fighting in the war. Their feelings were more compatible with the “working girl”, *noir* redeemer, and heroine characters, as opposed to the *femme fatale* characters. Those women's husbands, however, took notice of the *femme fatale* characters - - They were threatened by them. When they returned from World War II, those men were afraid that their wives would turn into those *femmes fatales*... and want to leave them for their independence.

Interestingly enough, some *femme fatale* characters do love the naïve partners they worked with; for example, *Bound*'s Violet has feelings for Corky, as does *Sunset Boulevard*'s Norma for Joe. *Gilda*'s Gilda does care for Johnny, Even *The Postman*'s Cora has some feelings for Frank. *Fatal Attraction*'s Alex loves Dan in her own bizarre way. *Basic Instinct*'s Catherine thinks that Nick is a handsome man, and has a sort of crush on him.

On the other hand, some *femme fatale* characters don't truly have feelings for their partners at all: *The Last Seduction*'s Bridget can't stand Mike, and *Double Indemnity*'s Phyllis just uses Walter to help her kill her husband for the insurance money. *Detour*'s Vera hates Al, and is suspicious of him. She thinks there is more to his background than he had told her.

Chapter Four: Third Wave Feminism - - How It Relates to *Bound* and *The Last Seduction*

Third Wave Feminism relates to the generation of women under the age of thirty-five, and it was especially emphasized in the 1990s (Chancer). They wish to challenge the Second Wave Feminism ideals, and to appreciate and focus on the needs of many groups: women of color, young girls, gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transsexuals, transgendered persons, among others. Moreover, third wave feminists are understanding of men, and don't criticize them or blame them for their problems as the second wave feminists tended to do. They consider and encourage the fluidity of others' identities, especially relating to sex, race, and geography (Breines).

Third wave feminists are cognizant of the issues that young women face each day, and address those the best way that they can (Code). The Riot Grrrl Movement - - popularized by the women rock groups of the early '90s - - is a part of Third Wave feminism. It focused on the empowerment of women through self-defense classes, reiterated to women to have a "can-do" attitude, and encouraged women to get involved in the issues pertinent to them (for example, abortion, domestic violence, sexual health, oppression, and voting matters). Courtney Love, Kim Gordon, bell hooks, L7, Bikini Kill, and Yoko Ono were influential to the Riot Grrrl Movement.

Third Wave feminists do not highlight the differences among themselves, regarding their social standing, ethnic background, race, and sexual orientation (Mann 2). Instead, they appreciate each other, and realize that all third wave feminists have something to contribute to the movement. Through identity politics, third wave feminism allows many groups to express what they feel about matters (4). They may have different views on issues, but third wave feminism doesn't discourage them from having dialogues. However, power feminists, such as Naomi Wolf and Katie Roiphe, are critical of the liberal views of Third Wave feminism.

Senna believes that Wolf and Roiphe promote power feminism, which can be considered putting emphasis on sexism, consumerism, and conservatism (Walker 1995).

Bound's Violet - - a lesbian *femme fatale*, who along with her lover Corky, plot to steal her mobster boyfriend Ceasar's \$2 million - - and Corky can be considered third wave feminists of sort because they are both young (under the age of 35); are appreciative of lesbian points of view, in addition to ones of other groups affiliated with the Third Wave; and aren't concerned about the differences of others. They also have "can-do" attitudes, and don't let obstacles get in their way in regards to trying to take Ceasar's money. Violet and Corky aren't afraid to fight back, and can be deemed empowered to defend themselves.

The Last Seduction's Bridget is a type of third wave feminist; she is under the age of 35, and is empowered to fight back when necessary. She possesses a "can-do" attitude, and doesn't let anyone discourage her from achieving her myriad ambitions. However, Bridget is a type of power feminist, because consumerism is important to her. Even though Violet and Corky plotted to steal the \$2 million from Ceasar, they aren't entirely obsessed with money. Bridget, on the other hand, thinks about money and spending all of the time. She wants to earn money any way possible, even if it can be considered risqué.

Violet, Corky, and Bridget are all characters from movies made in the 1990s: *Bound*, and *The Last Seduction*. Third Wave Feminism gained momentum in that decade, especially with Rebecca Walker's writings and the ideas of the Riot Grrrl Movement. "Girl Power" was emphasized by third wave feminists during the 1990s, with musical groups such as the Spice Girls reiterating that theme. Violet, Corky, and Bridget definitely possessed "Girl Power" and confidence.

Conclusion

The *femmes fatales* from the hard-boiled fiction/ classic *noir* and contemporary *noir* periods are certainly manipulative, and consider their needs before others. Their characters on the silver screen lure in male spectators through their “looks” (Mulvey “Visual Pleasure”); in addition, female spectators are fascinated by the *femmes fatales*’ need for control and power (Mulvey’s “Afterthoughts on ‘Visual Pleasure’”). The *femme fatale* characters from those three aforementioned decades come from a plethora of backgrounds.

The nature of the *femme fatale* is manipulative: She uses the male protagonist to help her achieve her aims, and will not be concerned with the aftermath of her actions - - even if it does result in the death or injury of the male protagonist. The well-being of the *femme fatale* is the top priority for her. She wants to advance in life, even if it does lead to disastrous results for others. Regardless of the workplace or home, the *femme fatale* will exhibit the characteristics of greed, duplicity, dishonesty, cheating, manipulation, and self-absorption; those are germane to her existence, and define her.

The *femme fatale*-like/pop culture actresses that I truly admire are Jayne Mansfield, Marilyn Monroe, Bettie Page, and Betty Grable. However, Jayne Mansfield holds a special place in my mom and I’s hearts - - because she is the mother of our favorite television actress, Mariska Hargitay. On *Law & Order: S.V.U.*, Mariska Hargitay stars as “Olivia Benson”, a detective who along with her colleagues works hard to capture the perpetrators of heinous sex crimes inflicted upon innocent children, women, and men. Like her mom, Mariska cares about others and appreciates her fans’ support.

Mariska Hargitay’s mom - - Jayne Mansfield - - was a platinum blonde, popular with her audience, beautiful, and possessed the alluring “look” - - as it was described by Laura Mulvey;

she was emulated and admired by many in the mainstream culture of the '50s and '60s. She is still well known and popular to this day. Her characters appealed to the male spectators in the movie audiences, because they were flirtatious, independent, and unpredictable (some characteristics possessed by *femmes fatales*). Female spectators in their films' audiences also enjoyed watching Jayne on the silver screen: Her film characters were confident, stylish, and determined (other *femme fatale*-like characteristics).

Jayne Mansfield's real name was Vera Jayne Palmer; she was born April 19, 1933, in the city of Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania ("Jayne Mansfield Article"). Sadly, she lost her father at a young age. Not soon after, her mother decided to relocate to Dallas, Texas, where she met and married Jayne's stepfather. At first, Jayne wasn't interested in acting - - until she started reading the popular fan magazines, and was convinced she could be an actress, too. While living in Dallas, Jayne entered and won some beauty pageants. She studied drama at the University of Texas (Austin), in addition to studying theatre at UCLA ("Jayne Mansfield Article"). Jayne was excited to be in L.A., where she began her acting career in television. In 1955, she starred in the film *Pete Kelly's Blues* ("Jayne Mansfield Article"). She played a sexy, *femme fatale*-like role in that movie, which led her to other acting jobs. The movie producers liked how she spoke in a small voice and her sex-kittenish manner, and cast her in films that flaunted those characteristics of hers.

Sadly, she was tragically killed in a car accident in 1967 (it occurred on a road in Slidell, Louisiana, when she was traveling to New Orleans for a T.V. engagement ("Jayne Mansfield Article")).

Unfortunately for Mariska, she grew up without really knowing her mother; she lost her mother at the age of 3. If Jayne were alive today, she definitely would have been involved in

Mariska's life. All of Jayne's five children were precious to her ("Jayne Mansfield Article"). Jayne may have played ditzy characters on the silver screen, but she was aware of the movie spectators who admired her. She wanted the audience to enjoy her films, and view them as an escape from their everyday troubles.

From this thesis, I would want these three questions to be further explored: 1) Besides their "look" and desire for power, how do the *femme fatale* appeal to the interests of both female and male spectators of today?; 2) Do modern-day young Hollywood stars and singers - - such as Christina Aguilera, Britney Spears, Paris Hilton, Lindsay Lohan, Fergie, Megan Fox, Giselle Bundchen, and Nicole Richie - - derive inspiration from these *femme fatale* characters? If so, did that help to mold them into who they have become?; and 3) Will future *femmes fatales* be less glamorous than the ones of the hard-boiled fiction/classic *noir* and contemporary *noir* periods? Or will they always exude an air of sophistication?

The *femme fatale* character will never entirely leave the silver screen. As long as movies are made, she will be perpetuated. *Femmes fatales* may be manipulative and sinister, but they make movies interesting to watch. With a *femme fatale* character, who knows what will happen in the movies; that's what I appreciate about *femmes fatales*: the unpredictability and spontaneity associated with them.

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Filmography

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